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THE
Intermediate State of the Soul
BETWEEN
Death and the Resurrection.

The Intermediate State of the Soul between
Death and the Resurrection.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE
CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS', WINDSOR

BY
CHR. WORDSWORTH, D.D.

BISHOP OF LINCOLN

New Edition.

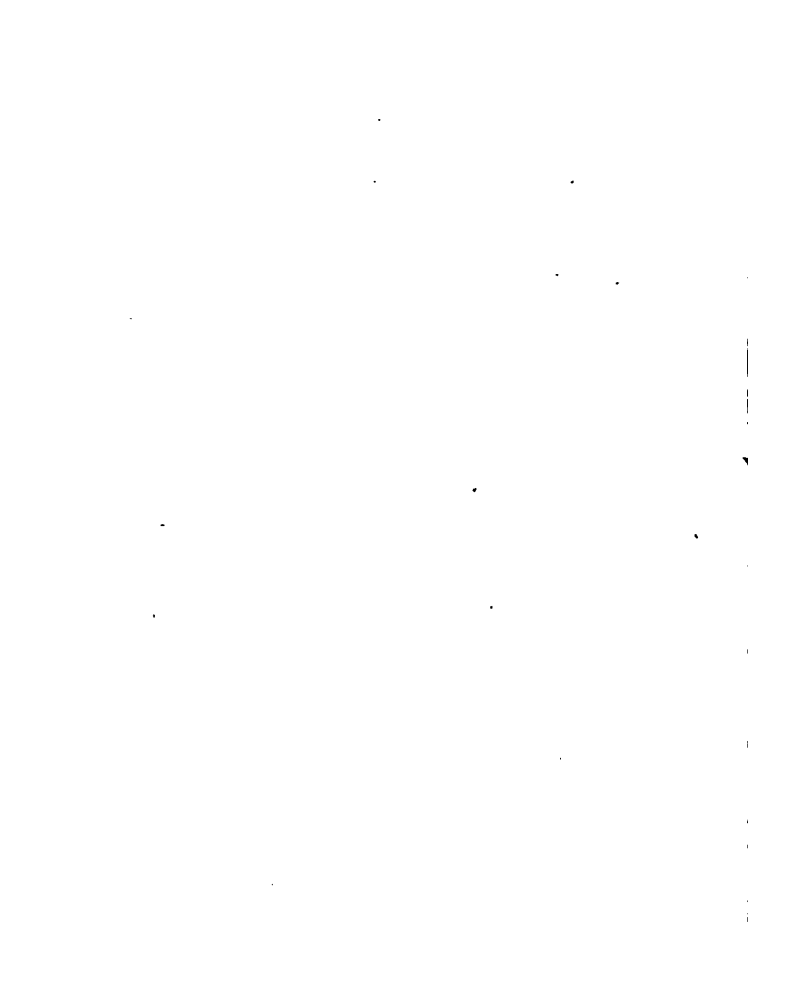
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1877



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**Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee,
To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise.**

LUKE XXIII. 43.

TO-DAY is the first anniversary of the consecration of this church. It is also the second anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone.

This church bears the name of "All Saints,"—not that it is dedicated to the Saints ; no, a church is the House of God, and is dedicated to Him—and this church, by its name "All Saints," exhorts us to bless Him for all the graces bestowed upon all who have lived holy lives upon earth, and

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who have departed in His true faith and fear.

Such being the case, brethren, it seems not unseasonable that, on this happy anniversary, we ourselves, who are still alive, and are permitted to worship God in this church, should meditate on the present condition of the saints departed ; with whom—though they are divided from us for a little while in the body by death, like a party of fellow-travellers on the other side of a stream, which we have not yet passed,—we are still united spiritually “in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

For meditations on this subject no words can be more appropriate than those of our Blessed Lord to the penitent on the cross, “Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.”

Consider, brethren, his case. His companion, who was crucified with him, railed

at Jesus. But he, of whom we speak, prayed to Christ, though he saw Him forsaken by His disciples, pierced with nails, crowned with thorns, hanging on the Cross, and working no miracle for His deliverance. Yet his faith was not staggered by what he saw. Through that dark cloud of sorrow he beheld the Lord of Glory. He confessed his sins ; he owned God's justice ; he declared Christ's innocence ; he prayed to Him as his Lord and King : " Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." He asked no present boon ; he was content to die, in the hope that at that future day, when He who was about to die on the Cross would come again in glory, he himself should not be forgotten. Then, " Lord," he said, " remember me."

Our Lord read the suppliant's heart ; He saw how sincere was his repentance, and how strong was his faith ; He forgave him his sins, and did not defer his recompense, but

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gave him an immediate reward. Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, *To-day* thou shalt be with Me *in Paradise*."

Brethren, in the time that has passed since the foundation stone of this church was laid, some of our dear friends and relatives have been taken from us. What is their condition now? And we ourselves must soon follow them. Where shall we then be? What will become of our souls when separated by death from our bodies? These, surely, are questions of the deepest and most solemn interest; and He who died for us, and who will judge us at the Great Day, has answered these questions, particularly by His reply to the penitent on the cross: "Verily I say unto thee, *To-day* thou shalt be with Me *in Paradise*."

Consider, therefore, dearly beloved, what these words mean.

On that day, very soon after He had spoken these words, Jesus died. He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," and

He gave up the ghost—that is, He breathed forth His human soul. He expired. The penitent also died.

Their bodies were taken down from the cross. The body of the penitent was probably consigned to the receptacle of the bodies of condemned malefactors. The body of our Blessed Lord was, we know, laid by itself in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa. Hence it is clear that the promise of our Blessed Lord to the penitent, “Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be *with Me* in Paradise,” did *not* refer to the penitent’s *body*. *That was not* with our Lord’s *body*; and the *grave is not Paradise*.

The promise of our Lord, therefore, referred to the penitent’s *soul*. Its meaning was this : To-day thou—that is, thy soul, thy better part—shall be with Me ; fear not, therefore, whatever may happen to thy body ; let that be cast into promiscuous heaps of dead in the dark charnel-house ; yet fear not. I know thy repentance, I see thy faith ;

thou hast owned Me as thy Lord and King, therefore the wicked one shall not hurt thee, and I will not defer thy reward. Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou—that is, the immortal part of thee—shalt be with Me in a place of peace and joy. To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.

Brethren, two questions arise here—*First*, How was our Lord with the penitent on that day? *Secondly*, What is Paradise?

In answer to the first question, it is to be borne in mind that our Blessed Lord is perfect Man, as well as perfect God. As perfect Man, He has not only a human body, but He has a human *soul* also. It is of that human soul that St. Luke speaks when he says, “Jesus increased in wisdom.” In Him, as God, and as therefore infinite in wisdom, there was no room for any such increase. Again, it was by an utterance of His human will that Jesus said in the agony of Geth-

semane, "Father, not My will, but Thine be done." It is of this human soul that He speaks on the Cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." It is of this human soul of Christ that the Evangelist says, "He gave up the ghost."

If Christ had not a human soul as well as a human body, He could not have died for us. For, brethren, what is death? It is the separation of the soul from the body. At His death our Lord's human soul went forth from His human body. And when He said to the penitent on the cross, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise," He gave him a blessed assurance that the sun would not set on that very day which was then drawing to a close, before the penitent's soul would be with our Blessed Lord's human soul in a happy place called Paradise. "Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

This, therefore, being perfectly clear, the

next question for our consideration is—*What is Paradise?* What did our Blessed Lord mean by saying that on that very day the penitent's soul should be with His own human soul in Paradise?

In reply to this question it is to be remembered that the word *Paradise* is of Eastern origin. It means a royal garden or princely park, girt with an enclosure, adorned with stately trees and fair shrubs and beautiful flowers, and stocked with beasts and birds, and watered with fresh streams. Hence, this word *Paradise* is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe the Garden of Eden, or of delight, in which our first parents were placed by God to dress it and to keep it.

In the New Testament the word *Paradise* occurs three times. Once in our text, once in the Revelation of St. John (Rev. ii. 7), a passage similar to our text, and once in that remarkable description which the Apostle

St. Paul gives, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, of the visions which he was permitted to behold, and which he calls "visions and revelations of the Lord." (2 Cor. xii. 4.)

It there appears, that, in order that the Apostle might be better prepared to encounter with joy the sufferings which awaited him in his long career of missionary labour and endurance for Christ, God was pleased to give him two distinct visions ; one vision, in which the Apostle was permitted to have a view of the future, full, final, and eternal happiness of the beatified saints in *heaven*. This is what the Apostle calls being "caught up into the third heaven."

But, besides this, the Apostle St. Paul had another vision of something nearer. He had a view of *Paradise*. "He was caught up," he says "into Paradise"—that is, he had a vision of that blessed place into which the souls of the faithful are admitted *immediately*

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after death ; and in which they remain in the interval between death and the resurrection of their bodies ; when their bodies will be glorified, and joined again to their souls, and the Judgment of quick and dead will take place ; and when they will be welcomed by Christ their Lord and King to the enjoyment of full, infinite, and everlasting felicity *both of body and soul in heaven.*

The Apostle St. Paul was thus prepared to meet with joy the sufferings of life in the cause of Christ. He had personal knowledge of the two successive states which lay before him after death ; first, the state of his own disembodied soul in Paradise, that state into which his own soul would go immediately on its disunion from the body, a state of such joy and happiness that he says "it is not for man to utter" what is felt there ; the other, the state of his soul when reunited to his body, raised from the grave at the Great Day of general Resurrection and of Judgment

—the eternal state of both body and soul in the infinite felicities of the third heaven, in the society of risen saints and angels, in the presence of God.

It was St. Paul's personal knowledge of these two successive states which elicited from the lips of the holy Apostle that memorable sentence (Rom. viii. 18), "*I reckon*"—that is, I, who have full acquaintance with the facts of the case, have duly calculated, and I now deliberately pronounce the result—" *I reckon* that the *sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be compared with," or put in the scale against, "the glory that shall be revealed in us." Therefore he exclaimed, "I desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. i. 23.) "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. i. 21.) And since he knew that though the happiness of his disembodied soul, immediately after its release from the burden of the flesh, would be exceeding great

in Paradise, far greater than any earthly happiness, and that it would there have a blessed foretaste of heavenly joy, yet that the soul's happiness would not be *complete* until it was reunited to the body, and that the body which had mouldered in the dust would be raised from the grave, and be changed into a glorious body, and be joined again to the soul at the Coming of Christ to Judgment, he says, "We that are in this tabernacle of the body do groan, being burdened : not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be *clothed upon*"—that is, we long for the general Resurrection, when our bodies will be raised from the dust and be clothed in a vesture of heavenly glory, like the body of Christ, and we shall enter into the full fruition of a blessed eternity, and be for ever with the Lord. (2 Cor. v. 2-4.)

These considerations enable us to recognise the propriety of the name by which the place is called, into which the souls of the faithful

go immediately on their departure from the body at death, and in which they remain until the resurrection of the body.

That blessed abode is called *Paradise*, not only on account of what it *is*, but also on account of what it is *not*.

It is called *Paradise*, because it is like a spiritual garden or park, or place fenced off from common ground, and far more beautiful. And as, literally, the word *Paradise* meant a royal park of an Eastern king, and as the park led to the palace, but was not the palace, so in a spiritual sense the word *Paradise*, as used by our Blessed Lord and the Apostles, meant a blessed place separate from earth, and far more lovely than any earthly region. Yet the park is not the palace ; and though *Paradise leads to Heaven*, which is the Royal Palace of the Eternal King, yet *Paradise is not Heaven*. And as, in a literal sense, the presence of Eastern kings was oftener vouchsafed to their paradise or park than to

other places, so we are authorized by Holy Scripture to believe that the souls of the faithful, which are in Paradise, have a nearer view of the Divine Presence than they ever had upon earth, and are, therefore, said to be "with Christ," and to be "in the hands of God," and so are unspeakably happy ; yet they have not as yet attained to the *perfect* joy of the beatific vision, to which they will be admitted at the general Resurrection, when the *bodies* of the faithful will be reunited to their souls, and which they will enjoy for ever in *heaven*.

These assertions are further confirmed by our Lord's words in other places of Scripture.

That the human *soul* does *not sleep* when separated from the body by death, but retains its consciousness in its disembodied state, is clear from His Divine words, "Fear not them which kill the *body*, but are *not* able to kill the *soul*." (Matt. x. 28 ; Luke xii. 4.)

Our Lord here makes a distinction between the state of the *body* after death and the state of the *soul* after death. He says that the body may be killed, but the *soul* cannot. But what does He mean by being *killed*? He means be laid *asleep*. For He has taught us that the hour is coming when all *bodies* will be *awakened* (John v. 28): "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and shall come forth." The *body sleeps* after death, and will be awakened from its slumber by the peal of the last trumpet. Therefore, *if* the *soul sleeps* after death, there would be *no* difference (as our Lord asserts there is) between the state of the *soul* and the state of the *body*, after death. Therefore the soul does *not sleep* after death, but retains its consciousness.

This is further evident from our Lord's parable of the rich man and Lazarus. (Luke xvi. 19-29.)

In that parable the beggar dies ; his body is cast into some obscure grave, but his soul is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also dies, and is buried. The world is still going on as before. The five brethren of the rich man are living in their houses. But Christ uplifts the veil, and shows us the place where disembodied souls are ; and there we see the rich man tormented, and the poor man comforted ; we see the soul of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom—which is another name for Paradise—the happy abode into which the souls of the faithful pass immediately after their departure from death ; and it is called *Abraham's bosom* because it is not a solitary place, but a happy place of holy society ; and it is called from *Abraham*, because Abraham was “the friend of God, and the father of the faithful,” and it is called his *bosom*, from the Eastern manner of guests reclining at feasts, as St. John leaned at the Paschal Feast on the bosom of

Christ (John xiii. 23) ; and because in that blessed place the souls of the faithful recline as it were at a spiritual banquet, and are refreshed with spiritual delights, and enjoy sweet converse with the souls of holy men and holy women of every age, with Patriarchs and Prophets, Apostles and Evangelists, Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors ; and because at the Great Day they will be called forth, when the number of God's elect is accomplished, and they will be joined again to their bodies, and will "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of God." (Matt. viii. 11 ; xiii. 29.)

These blessed truths are revealed to us in Holy Scripture. And these blessed truths are ever sounding in our ears in solemn tones in that admirable exposition of Holy Scripture, our Book of Common Prayer, in the Office for the Burial of the Dead. In that beautiful and most instructive and

affecting Office the Church puts this prayer into our mouth : " Almighty God, with whom do *live* the *spirits* of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the *souls* of the faithful, *after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh*, are in joy and felicity."

By these words she declares the true faith, namely, that the *soul* does *not sleep*, when separated from the body by death, and that the disembodied souls of the faithful are in joy, while their bodies sleep in the grave. But, lest we should imagine that the souls of the faithful departed have as yet attained their *full and final* happiness, or *will* attain it *before* the Great Day of Resurrection and Judgment, she bids us further pray, in the same Collect, that God would be pleased to hasten His Kingdom, and that Christ would come again in glory to raise their bodies from the grave, so that "all who have departed this life in the true faith of His Holy Name may have their *perfect* consummation and bliss

both in *body* and *soul* in His *eternal* and everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Let us now proceed to derive some practical inferences from this important inquiry.

1. In our Lord's words to the penitent on the cross let us see the blessedness of true repentance and lively faith. "Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." The circumstances of that case were special, and cannot again occur; Christ cannot hang again on the Cross, and therefore these words offer no encouragement to delay, or to reliance on a death-bed repentance. But they are a signal proof of the love and power of Christ. They show His love, in that, when He Himself was suffering the sharp agonies of an excruciating death, He had compassion on the penitent; His power, in that, when He was descending into the lowest depths of humiliation and shame, He

took into His hand the key of pardon and unlocked the golden gates of Paradise, and admitted a faithful soul to instantaneous bliss.

Thus, brethren, even the Cross of Christ became, as it were, a judgment-seat—it became like a royal throne, on which He spoke as Judge and King of the world : “Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.”

And since Christ’s power was so great in His hour of shame, how great will be His glory, how awful will be His Majesty, when He comes on the clouds of heaven to judge the world ! Let therefore this act of Christ inspire us with fervent love and godly fear.

2. Again, bearing this Scripture in mind, let us not be deceived by those who imagine that the saints departed are already admitted to heaven ; and who even venture to address prayers to them as if they were reigning in

heaven. St. John, in the Apocalypse, teaches us that the saints themselves pray for the Coming of Christ. (Rev. vi. 10.) He teaches us that they are not yet advanced to the full happiness of heaven. Their condition is not yet perfect. It is one of hope and expectation; and we have no warrant for believing that they can hear our prayers; and prayer to them is an act of presumptuous intrusion into the secrets of the unknown world. It is a sin against which St. Paul warns us when he says, "Let no one beguile you of your reward in the worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." (Col. ii. 18.)

3. Next, let this Scripture warn us against another false doctrine—that of Purgatory; according to which it is affirmed by some that those persons who have made their peace with God on their death-bed, but have not

suffered the temporal penalties due to their sins, nor made the temporal satisfaction for them, pass at death into a place called *Purgatory*, where, it is alleged, they endure pains equal to the pains of hell itself in intensity, though not in duration, from which they are to be redeemed by their sorrowing friends by means of prayers and masses and indulgences. A most dreary doctrine, especially for the poor ; and a dangerous delusion. Holy Scripture warns us against it. We see that the soul of Lazarus is carried *immediately* by angels into Abraham's bosom. We see that the soul of the penitent passes *immediately* into Paradise. And the beloved Evangelist St. John says, in the Book of Revelation (Rev. xiv. 13), "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead that die" (or, as it is literally, Blessed are the dead who *are dying* in the Lord—that is, Blessed are they at the very moment of their death) "from henceforth :

Even so, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours."

4. Again, let us not imagine that the soul at its departure from the body at the hour of death passes into a region of slumber and insensibility. No; the atheist and the libertine who desire the death of the soul may dream of its sleep. But the faithful Christian knows that his soul, like its Divine Author, will neither slumber nor sleep. He knows that it is written that the traitor Judas, at the hour of death, went to "his own place." (Acts i. 25.) He knows that the soul of the rich man in our Lord's parable passed immediately at death into a place of torment; and he knows that the soul of Lazarus went immediately from the rich man's gate to Abraham's bosom. He knows that the soul of the penitent went instantaneously from the cross into Abraham's bosom.

Therefore, brethren, let us not delay our repentance in the hope that if we do not repent,

but die in our sins, there yet may be a long respite of punishment ; that there may be an interval of many years between the day of our death and the Day of Judgment. True, there may be as to our *bodies*; but not so as to our *souls*. There is no such prorogation of punishment to the wicked ; there is no such delay of joy to the righteous. *To-day*, even to-day, if thou dost not repent, thou mayest be with the rich man in torment. To-day even to-day, thou mayest be with the penitent in Paradise. Virtually and practically the day of our death is the Day of Judgment to us. For at death the soul enters immediately into a state of happiness or of misery ; it goes to its "own place," and it there has an anticipation and foretaste of the even greater happiness or misery on which it will enter when joined again to the body at the Day of Resurrection and of Judgment. Therefore, let us not put off our repentance. Now, even now, "the Judge standeth at the door."

5. And while we remember this solemn truth, let us not be betrayed into the error of thinking and of speaking of good men who are departed, as if they were already admitted to the full felicity of *heaven*. Such a mode of speech overlooks the constitution of human nature itself. Man is composed of body as well as soul. And the soul's perfect happiness will not be attained before its reunion to the body. Such a mode of expression overlooks, also, the great doctrine of the Resurrection of the body, and the universal Judgment to come, and it mars the Communion of Saints, and violates our own fellowship of hope and prayer with departed spirits, who wait for us, and whose happiness will not be completed without us, but will be perfected with ours at Christ's coming (Heb. xi. 40), for which they pray as well as we.

6. "Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

Here is consolation to us in looking for-

ward to our own death. If we are like the penitent on the cross; if we are crucified with Christ; if, though the world forsake Him or revile Him, we boldly confess Him in the presence of His enemies; if we bewail our sins, if we trust in Him, if we pray to Him as our Lord, our Saviour, and our King, then death to us will not be a fearful thing. No; it will be a happy passage to a pleasant place, to a beautiful garden, a spiritual Eden. We shall see, with the eye of faith, our adorable Saviour Himself standing near our death-bed, and shall hear His blessed voice : "To-day shalt thou be in Paradise."

7. Yet further, Are there any here present who are looking forward with trembling apprehension to the departure from among them of some dear Christian friend or relative? Here is your consolation. That beloved one, at whose bedside you are watching, is not going on a dark and forlorn journey to a dreary and dismal land. No, no. The mortal

body, indeed, will be laid for a short time in the grave, but even that body will only sleep, in order to be awakened from its slumber by the blessed voice of a loving Saviour, and to be clothed with angelic beauty and glory. But the *soul* of that beloved one, if that soul believes in Christ, and loves Him, and trusts in Him, will wing its viewless flight to Paradise, and will join the blessed company of departed saints there. Here is your comfort, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, in ministering at that sick bed, and at that death-bed of your dear friend. Pray for him, and pray with him. Join with him in the devout reception of the Holy Communion, which is the best preparation for the last journey before him ; then there is good hope that with his dying breath he will bless your tender care ; that his soul at his death will be borne on the wings of holy angels into Paradise, and that it will be there with the souls of others whom you have dearly

loved on earth, and will hold sweet converse with them, and will speak, it may be, to them of your last ministries of love. And then what joy will be yours! You will not sorrow, as those who have no hope, for him who has gone away from you. He has not left you; he is only gone before you for a little while. He who has departed from you is in a blessed place; after the weary voyage of this troublesome world, he rests in a calm harbour and is at peace, and has a blessed foretaste of everlasting joy.

8. Finally, brethren, this Scripture has practical instruction for us in reference to this day's anniversary.

We are now gathered together in the presence of God, the Father of the spirits of all flesh, in a church on earth—the church of All Saints.

The time is coming—it cannot be very far off for any of us, and it may be very near to some of us—when our souls will go forth from

our bodies, being separated from them by death. And then, at that very moment (and that moment may be even on this day), that soul of ours will be either in a place of sorrow or of joy. What will then our worldly wealth profit us? All the pomp and splendour of the rich man in our Lord's parable could not buy him a drop of water to refresh him in his torments. Therefore, brethren, let us use our worldly wealth well, and not delay a single moment to use it; let us devote it, and devote it immediately, to the promotion of God's glory, in works of piety and love, such as that which asks for our Christian bounty to-day. This church has received noble benefactions, but it is in want of further help. Would to God that He would to-day so touch your hearts with the love of Christ that the sum needed might be offered now to Him who loved us and died for us. Be assured, beloved, that such acts of mercy as these, if done in humble faith and reliance on the

merits of Christ, who alone can make them pleasing to God, are among the best preparatives for a blessed passage from a church of All Saints on earth, to the Church of Saints in Paradise, and to the glorified Church of All Saints in Heaven, to which may God in His infinite mercy bring us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



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